Touch

Jaywant Dalvi

Art: Sujata Singh

Jaywant Dalvi

Jaywant Dalvi was a senior Marathi writer. His most famous works include plays, novels, and short story collections. Many of his works have been translated into Hindi and other Indian and foreign languages and have been the subject of much discussion.

The spirit of translating a person's innermost thoughts onto paper through pen has been the focus of almost all of his works. Many of his works revolve around the relationship between men and women. His plays have gained unprecedented fame, among which 'Mahasagar', 'Sandhyachhaya' and 'Purush' are notable. Among his story collections, the most important are 'Sparsh', 'Rukmini' and 'Swapanrekha'. He has about fourteen novels, among which 'Dharmanand', 'Mahananda', 'Swagat' and 'Chakra' became very famous. A film has been made on 'Mahananda' in Marathi and on 'Chakra' in Hindi. In 'Chakra', he has given a very touching and lively description of the people living in slums, otherwise almost all his works are based on the middle class lifestyle.

He was proficient in all genres, including drama, satire and short stories. The works clearly reflect the difficulties and struggles of contemporary life, and the impact of this lifestyle on the human heart. The story "Sparsh" also vividly depicts the feelings of Nani.

The rays of the evening sun hadn't yet reached the ground. They seemed to filter through the branches of a large peepal tree. The breeze tickled the entire tree, making it laugh. A parrot peeked out of a hollow in the trunk. A long nest hung from a branch. Who knew which bird it was?

Beneath the tree, staring skyward stood Ramarao. There were tears in his eyes. No one knew why?

I don't know why tears welled up in his eyes today. Four years back when Nani had gone to the ashram, even then his eyes weren't so moist. Now that she’s returning back after recovery, there should be joy in his heart. Then why was he unhappy?

Under the peepal tree, a whole group waited for Nani’s arrival. Nani's son, Veenu, and his wife, Anuradha. Their eight-year-old son, Ranga, and the women and children of the neighborhood had all gathered.

"Ranga, even if grandmother calls you, don't go anywhere near her!" Anuradha explained to Ranga again and again.

Ramarao did not like this. Doctors had said that she was now completely cured and healthy.

"Bhaiyaram and Nani should have come by now."

"Wait, the bus is coming." The neighboring aunt, trying to quiet everyone, listened attentively.

But Ramarao didn't think so. He had heard the sound of the bus several times earlier.

"She's here, she's here!" Kaku shouted again. This time, the bus really came. The group sitting on the platform stood up.

Ramarao Dagad stood like a stone. His gaze fell on an old Ganesha idol beneath the peepal tree. It was a Dagad family tradition to light the lamp there.

"Anu, it is getting dark, please light a lamp in front of the idol. Nani will like it."

"Yes, okay!"

Anu lit a lamp in front of Ganpati. The dim flame swayed in the breeze. The statue looked so peaceful in the light. The fingers of the statue's hands were worn out by water and wind. The trunk was badly scratched. Its long ears were broken. Ramarao had been observing it for ages. But he never experienced the hidden power inside that stone diety.

The bus stopped near the gate.

Bhaiyaram got down first, then he helped Nani to climb down.

"How come you're so late, Bhaiyaram?" Veenu asked from a distance.

"The bus tyre got punctured!" Bhaiyaram said while unloading the luggage.

"There are usually a million obstacles in Nakti's wedding!" said Nani, bursting out laughing.

With her laughter, the whole atmosphere became brighter.

Four years ago, when Nani left home to go to the Amravati Ashram, I thought that perhaps now, she will never return. As she left, she touched every object in the house for the last time. She bowed to Ganesha and touched him with her hand, and sat before him for a moment.

Her joy at returning to the same home was very natural. Nani's lips were parted over her mouth. But her face was filled with joy.

"Ranga, take this ball!" Nani called out to Ranga.

But Ranga stood still. He did not move at all.

"He's probably forgotten you! Once he recognizes you, he won't leave you!" Anu said pushing Ranga, further behind.

“Mom, he'll come to you later!" said Veenu.

Grandmother stretched her hand to hold the bar while climbing the stairs.

“Support her, Bhaiyaram," Veenu shouted.

Taking support from Bhaiyaram, grandmother climbed up and stopped on the platform.

"I was wondering if anyone still lights the lamp for Lord Ganesha."

"Everything has gone on as you left it. Please pay your salutations to Lord Ganesha!" Ramarao replied.

Grandmother bowed her head before Ganesha and sat down before him. She glanced around in the gloomy evening dimness. The children stared at her as if something new had arrived. Grandma smiled.

If there is joy in the heart, then nothing else matters.

Just then Kaku came to meet Nani. The neighbors, were meeting Nani after years, so they got engrossed in a conversation.

As they talked, she took a close look Nani’s nose and lips. They were streaked with white marks.

Just then the cow started bellowing.

“She recognized me," Nani said with laughter.

Nani and Ramarao headed towards the cowshed.

Grandmother patted the cow and caressed her face lovingly.

Then Nani entered the house. After washing her hands and face, she came and sat on the platform to drink tea.

"You won't do any work here, Nani," Anu came and said.

"Why?"

“All you should do is rest and relax!”

"Who said that? Veenu?" asked Nani and then laughed.

Today was her day to laugh.

In the evening Nani picked up a pot and headed towards the cowshed.

"What are you doing?!!" Anu shouted with shock.

"I'm going to milk the cow."

“Please put the pot away. You don't have to work."

“You see in the ashram, I used to cook food!”

"There were doctors there! Who would run around here?"

“Nothing will happen," Nani said walking towards the cowshed.

"Please put the pot away!" Anu's voice was stern. Nani put back the pot. A pang of pain welled up in her heart. She had been insulted.

She went inside immediately. Covering the face with her sari pallu, she wept. Before sleeping, she made a resolution, "This house is mine; everyone must obey my orders." At the ashram, she cooked meals for ten-fifteen people. Here she was not allowed to do any work?

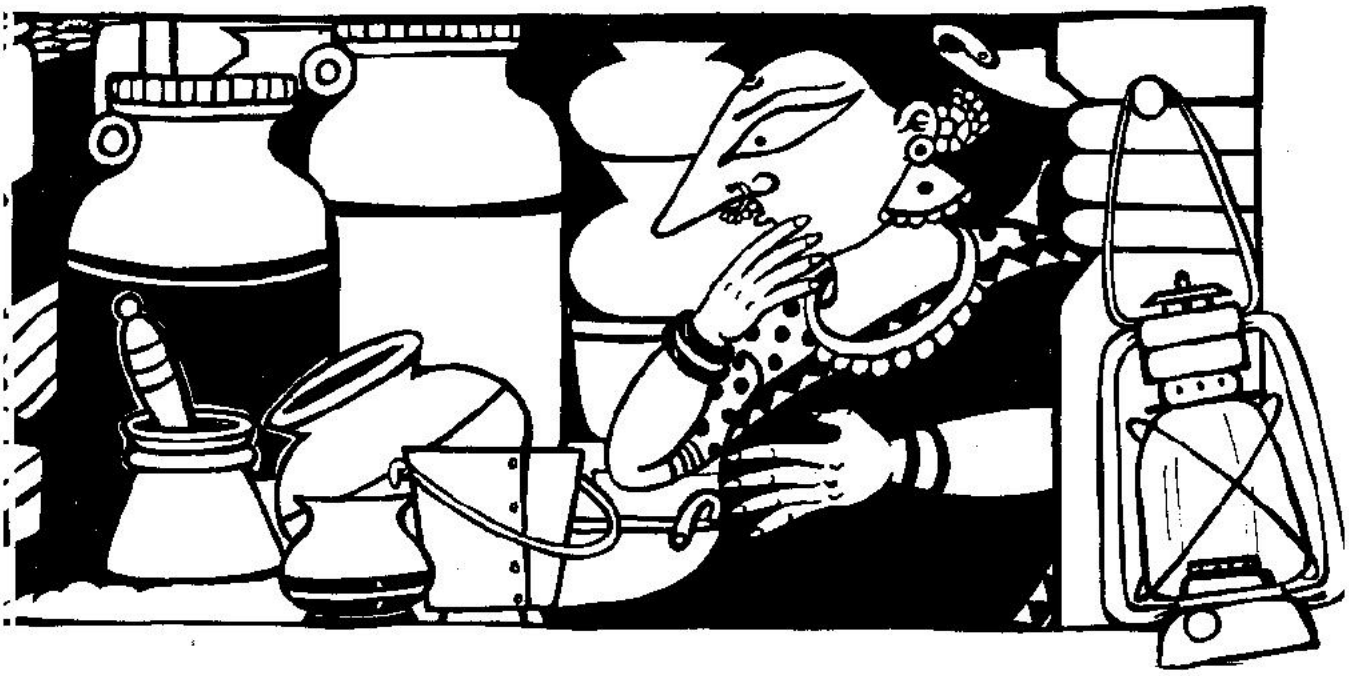
She woke up at dawn. After bathing, she took the flour container, kneaded the dough, and made rotis.

Anu saw a pile of rotis near the stove.

“Who made all these rotis?”

"I did! Who else?"

Anu hit her hand on the head. Nani ignored her and got back to cleaning.



After the men had finished their meal, Anu and Nani sat down to eat.

"Did everyone eat the rotis?"

"Yes!"

"Did anyone say anything?"

“Yes, father-in-law said, the rotis were very soft!”

Hearing this, Nani's face lit up.

Anu said nothing. While eating, she looked at Nani's fingers. They had tiny nails on crooked fingers. Nani was eating with those very hands.

After dinner, while going inside the house Nani spotted Veenu.

"Veenu, how did you like the rotis made by me?"

"I liked them!"

Grandmother happily went to the veranda, where Ramarao was pacing up and down.

"How did you like the rotis today?"

“There were no rotis today?"

Ramarao's attention suddenly went towards Veenu's eyes and he felt very embarrassed.

Nani sensed something fishy. She felt a little depressed. She spread a mat inside the house and tried to sleep. But tears welled up in her eyes.

That evening, she quietly searched for the milk container. The milk container lay with other washing utensils. The flour container was also for washing! The container was filled to the brim with flour in the morning. So why had it been left to wash? she thought. Then picking up the milk container she headed towards the cowshed.

Taking water, he washed the cow's udders. Then her eyes fell on the rotis lying in front of the cow. Nani stood up immediately.

She brought the utensil into the house and sat on the swing in the courtyard, trying to suppress her choked emotions.

That night she went to her room. There were two beds there, a little apart. Was it the same yesterday?

She pulled the two beds together. Then facing towards Ramarao she lay on one bed, with one hand stretched.

At night she opened her eyes.

Ramarao was lighting the lamp.

Then she quickly pulled her bedding aside. There was a clinking of bangles, and Nani's hand fell on the floor. But Ramarao didn't lift and place her hand on her bedsheet.

Not even a little contact or touch!

A sob escaped Nani's lips. But she didn't cry. Tears just flowed from her eyes. Her hand remained in that position for who knows how long.

In the morning, Ramarao got up and came out. But Nani had woken up much before him.

"Hasn't mother-in-law woken up?"

"She woke up long ago."

"No"

"No? Hey Veenu..." Ramarao screamed.

Veenu came running. They searched everywhere. They checked every room, but Nani was nowhere to be found.

A lamp burned beneath the peepal tree. Ganesha had a sandalwood tilak on his forehead and jasmine flowers on his trunk.

"Where could she have gone?"

People fanned out in all directions in search for Nani.

Later it was found that Nani was seen at the bus stand boarding a bus to Amravati.